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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2366 (2017), in which the Council established the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and requested me to report on the implementation of its mandate every 90 days, as well as resolution 2381 (2017) authorizing the Mission to monitor the temporary, bilateral, national ceasefire between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) (ELN) and asking me to report on this additional task. This report covers the first 90-day reporting period, from the start of its mandate, on 26 September, to 26 December 2017.

II. Major developments

2. The implementation of Colombia's Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, signed on 24 November 2016, is entering its second year. The first year's highlight were the complex process of ceasefire and separation of forces, the laying down of weapons by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP), including the disposal of hundreds of arms caches; the transition of thousands of FARC-EP members to civilian life; and the transformation of the armed organization into a political party.

3. Even though in recent years the conflict affected mainly rural areas, the impact of the peace process is tangible throughout the country. While several illegal armed actors continue to be active, the focus of institutions and the country's political agenda are no longer dominated by the war, as illustrated by the main themes of the ongoing electoral campaign. Other issues and concerns have taken centre stage, some of them long overshadowed by the generations-old conflict. Even among those who are sceptical of the Peace Agreement, there is a perception that new circumstances have arisen and new opportunities now exist to address historical fractures and build a more stable and unified country.

Legislative agenda

4. Overall, the implementation of the peace-related legislative agenda has progressed unevenly, compounded by events relating to the presidential and parliamentary elections, to be held in the first semester of 2018. Several political parties that had initially approved the Peace Agreement have distanced themselves

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from important provisions of the Agreement, including legislation relating to the transitional justice architecture and victims.

5. Fast-track procedures adopted by Congress in December 2016 to expedite the consideration of peace-related legislation expired on 30 November. By that date, important laws had been passed, some requiring very significant compromises to ensure their passage; nevertheless, a sizeable number of bills were not approved, notwithstanding considerable effort by the Government.

6. The most significant bill approved was the statutory law regulating the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which was passed on 30 November. The statute adheres to language from a recent Constitutional Court decision that safeguards the political participation of members of the People's Alternative Revolutionary Force (FARC) political party but also limits the scope of the Special Jurisdiction with respect to third parties and, in some respects, reduces its independence from the regular justice system. In particular, controversy surrounded the approval of an amendment that bars any person who, in the past five years, has represented clients in cases related to the armed conflict, or in cases against the State at the national or international levels, from serving as magistrates of the Special Jurisdiction. Government officials and human rights organizations have argued that this amendment is unconstitutional. The statute is pending review by the Constitutional Court.

7. On 30 November, Congress appeared to fall one vote short of approving a law on the special transitory electoral districts for peace, which would have created 16 new seats in the House of Representatives for victims of the conflict, drawn from rural and conflict-affected areas. In its final vote in the Senate, the measure received 50 votes, which the President of the Senate ruled fell short of the qualified majority required. The Government and civil society organizations have appealed the ruling.

8. A total of 11 laws, including six constitutional reforms, were approved by Congress over the 12 months of fast-track authority. Eight laws could not be approved, including important legislation on political participation, rural development and special provisions facilitating the surrender of criminal organizations. During the same period, 36 decree-laws and 60 ordinary decrees related to implementing the Peace Agreement were issued by the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón. Of those 107 laws and decrees, 49 were dedicated to reintegration; 6 to security guarantees; 9 to victims, truth, justice and reparation; and 21 to social and rural development; and the remaining ones were cross-cutting.

Rulings of the Constitutional Court

9. All of those laws and decree-laws are subject to review by the Constitutional Court. To date, four laws and 19 decree-laws were found to be consistent with the Constitution. An important law endorsed by the Court established the Peace Agreement as a frame of reference for the formulation of public policies and provided the obligation for civil servants to comply with the Agreement for the next 12 years.

10. On 14 November, the Court unanimously endorsed, with amendments, the law creating the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition. It cleared the way for FARC participation in the 2018 elections and stated that Special Jurisdiction magistrates would determine whether future sanctions of that jurisdiction would impinge upon the political participation of FARC. On the other hand, it identified a series of new conditions FARC members would have to fulfil in order to retain their right to appear before the Special Jurisdiction, rather than the regular judicial system. It upheld some functions assigned to the Special Jurisdiction but also established the right to appeal its decisions to the regular court system, and subjected Special Jurisdiction magistrates to existing judicial oversight

and disciplinary regimes. FARC objected strongly to those amendments, including in a letter addressed to me. In its approach, the Court said it sought to define a middle ground in what has undoubtedly been the most controversial issue raised by the Peace Agreement. At the same time, the Court's pronouncement does reduce the autonomy of the transitional justice system as established under the Agreement and limits the corresponding judicial guarantees to FARC members. Human rights organizations have criticized the ruling for failing to uphold victims' rights through the dilution of provisions concerning civilians who participated in the conflict.

11. The Court's ruling paved the way for the functioning of the Special Jurisdiction, the Commission on Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, and the Special Unit for the Search for Persons deemed as missing in the context of and due to the armed conflict. I acknowledge the professional and impartial work carried out by the Selection Committee responsible for selecting the magistrates and other officials of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition. The United Nations was involved in the work of the Committee through my designation of Diego García-Sayán as an independent expert. I recognize, in particular, the Committee's efforts to achieve gender balance in the composition of those bodies. I welcome the appointment of distinguished persons to serve as Director of the Investigation and Indictment Unit, Chair of the Commission on Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, Director of the Special Unit for the Search for Persons deemed as missing, and Director of the Special Investigation Unit in the Office of the Attorney General to investigate and dismantle criminal organizations. The Commission on Truth was established on 6 December and I hope that all bodies will soon be fully functioning.

III. Mission tasks

A. Security guarantees

Security of former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army

12. During the reporting period, the military and police continued to comply with the commitment to maintain a security presence around the 26 territorial areas for training and reintegration. While in many areas the relationship between former FARC-EP members and security forces has remained collaborative, in others the trust between former adversaries has eroded following the end of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism. On 16 December, a group of soldiers entered the territorial area of Colinas (Guaviare Department) in the early morning, without prior coordination, causing alarm among former FARC-EP members. Proactive efforts, including by the Mission, will be required to ensure continued cooperation between public security forces and former combatants. In addition, in the case of territorial areas near or within indigenous reserves, growing tensions have been observed, pointing to the need for greater coordination between military, police and ethnic authorities.

13. The national police has accompanied its deployments with initiatives aimed at confidence-building and prevention. The secure and peaceful communities programme, which focuses on coexistence and security, is being implemented in most territorial areas and nearby communities.

14. The Ministry of National Defence inter-institutional "Blue Tent" initiative, which is intended to bring together security sector institutions under one roof, is present around all territorial areas, but with different participants and objectives, and an uneven degree of success. In some territorial areas, the Blue Tent appears to

provide an opportunity for dialogue and conflict resolution. In others, former FARC-EP members and community members have said that it fails to provide adequate responses. In addition, former combatants in some territorial areas and nearby communities are concerned that the Blue Tent is perceived as being dedicated to intelligence-gathering and exposes its participants to stigmatization as informants. While the Government passed a decree that defines Blue Tent as an inter-institutional mechanism within territorial stabilization efforts, it needs more meaningful participation of local civilian authorities, and the means to provide more tangible peace dividends to communities.

15. While territorial areas benefit from basic security conditions, there has been a significant increase in the number of killings of former FARC-EP members outside these areas. From 26 September to 18 December, there were 17 cases of homicide of former FARC-EP members who, at some point, were part of the reintegration process. This includes at least six former FARC-EP members killed on 16 October in the Department of Nariño, and two killed on 28 November in the same department. This brings the total number of homicides of former members accredited by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace since April 2017 to 34, in addition to the homicides of 13 of their family members. The most affected departments, by number of homicides, are Nariño (15), Antioquia (8) and Cauca (5).

16. These killings do not correspond to a nationwide pattern. While they tend to occur in areas with growing presence of illegal armed groups, land disputes, illegal economies and other conflicts, a comprehensive picture is yet to emerge. The Office of the Attorney General is investigating these cases and to date, there has been one conviction and arrests in three additional cases.

17. Looking to the electoral period ahead, it is important that, as part of the broad framework of Decree-law 895 of 29 May 2017 on the Comprehensive Security System for the Exercise of Politics, protection measures be put in place for actors involved in political activities, including former FARC-EP members. Threats against FARC members participating in political activities have been reported in the departments of Antioquia, Caquetá, Cauca and Nariño. At present, FARC members in charge of political activities at the local level do not have individual protection measures. As a first step to remedy this situation, the National Protection Unit has authorized the close protection teams available to FARC leaders in the regions to be put at the disposal of ex-combatants who have to leave the territorial areas temporarily.

18. The National Protection Unit has taken other steps to enhance current personal protection efforts, including identifying 162 FARC members in need of personal protection, of whom 104 are currently covered. As of 18 December, 609 former FARC-EP members have gone through the Unit's training programmes and joined the close protection teams of FARC members. By the end of 2017, the number is expected to reach about 700, and it is further expected that a new training programme for 400 trainees will start in February 2018. The inclusion of a larger number of women would be a valuable and feasible step. It is important that the Unit finalizes its comprehensive protection programme and secures adequate resources.

19. In Antioquia, one of the departments in which the highest number of homicides of former FARC-EP members have occurred, a working group on security guarantees has been established to follow up on the most urgent security situations in the region. Members of the working group include the Office of the Governor, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, the National Protection Unit, FARC and the Mission. Similar initiatives are about to be launched in Cauca and Nariño. The Mission has worked with the Unit on risk assessments for areas where former combatants reside in those three departments.

Security of communities in the areas most affected by the conflict

20. While national figures continue to show a decrease in violence indicators, the situation in the areas most affected by the conflict illustrates the profound challenges faced in the consolidation of peace. In recent weeks, the police, the armed forces, the Attorney General, the Ombudsman's Office, civil society organizations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia of the Organization of American States and others with a presence in the field have reached consistent conclusions about insecurity in rural areas, in particular those where former FARC-EP members are present. According to the Office of the Attorney General, compared to 2016, there has been an increase in homicides in 11 areas, across nine departments located in former conflict zones that are particularly affected by illegal economies. Based on police statistics in 281 municipalities, the foundation Paz y Reconciliación reported a 4.6 per cent increase in the number of homicides, or a 7.6 per cent increase if only the rural areas of those municipalities are considered. For its part, the non-governmental organization Somos Defensores reported 90 assassinations of social leaders and human rights defenders (77 men and 13 women), from the beginning of 2017 until 30 November, as compared with 68 assassinations during the same period in 2016 — a 32 per cent increase. The most affected departments in 2017 were Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Valle del Cauca. Those figures are consistent with the figures reported by OHCHR. In a communiqué issued on 20 December 2017, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported having verified, as of that date, the killing of 73 social leaders, 18 members of social and political movements, and 14 people during social protests. Eleven additional cases were reported by OHCHR to be in the process of verification.

21. This pattern of violence brings into relief the overarching challenge of filling the power vacuum left in the large areas formerly under the influence of FARC-EP. In these areas, the absence or inadequate presence of state institutions, both civilian agencies and security forces, following the withdrawal of FARC-EP forces, has enabled illegal armed groups to spread rapidly in an attempt to exploit the revenues from illegal economies. Their expansion has been accompanied by an increase in violence in areas where these groups are determined to undercut government-sponsored coca substitution programmes, and where they compete for control of land, illegal mining, coca cultivation and drug trafficking routes. As a result, new displacements among communities affected by that violence have taken place. The proliferation of violent incidents and displacements along the Pacific Coast is of particular concern.

22. The municipality of Tumaco (Nariño) witnessed one of the most serious incidents since the signing of the Peace Agreement, when, on 5 October, at least seven community members were killed and some 20 wounded during a coca eradication operation. Three days later, a fact-finding team that included officials from the Department of Nariño, the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia, the Verification Mission and OHCHR, was prevented from accessing the site by members of the counter-narcotics police, who launched tear gas and stun grenades. Initial statements by the authorities pointing to the responsibility of illegal groups were later disproved by forensic evidence and interviews carried out by the staff of the Ombudsman's Office. Following initial inquiries led by the Vice-President of Colombia, Oscar Naranjo, a number of members of the counter-narcotics force were suspended or transferred and placed under investigation. Investigations by the Office of the Attorney General and the Inspector General are ongoing. It is of the utmost importance that these institutions finalize their investigations and take appropriate sanctions against the perpetrators.

23. The many manifestations of violence — the struggle of armed groups for dominance in particular areas; threats and attacks against communities, promoters of coca substitution and human rights defenders; the displacement of communities; and attacks against land restitution advocates — are not necessarily traceable to a single set of causes. On 19 December, the Attorney General stated that there is a somewhat systematic approach to these killings. Taken together, they illustrate the magnitude and the urgency of the challenge faced by Colombian institutions and society in large parts of the country's rural areas.

24. In recent weeks, several important measures have been taken. Under the leadership of the President and the Vice-President, the armed forces and the police have updated the stabilization plan, known as "Plan Victoria", which was put in place a year ago but had not delivered the expected results. Aiming to achieve a more permanent, visible and effective presence in sensitive areas, the new plan, known as "Horus", focuses on 13 high-priority and 54 medium-priority municipalities, as opposed to the 160 municipalities covered by the initial Plan Victoria. Priorities are based on a combination of the following main factors: areas formerly under the influence of FARC-EP, the issuance of early warnings by the Ombudsman's Office, killings of social leaders, human rights defenders and former FARC-EP members, the presence of illegal armed groups, the presence of illicit crops and illegal mining, killing of and threats against land restitution advocates, patterns of extortion and kidnapping, and reports from the United Nations and the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia on communities' perceptions of insecurity. The deployment of the public security forces will include direct communication and co-responsibility with civil authorities and communities. It is important that the armed forces and police make an effort to increase the presence of women among deployed security personnel, in order to help improve the response to the specific security risks to women. The plan provides for a regular assessment of its effectiveness, in collaboration with the United Nations, and the Mission will adjust its deployment accordingly.

25. The President has stressed that this effort must be accompanied by a renewed commitment by the Armed Forces to dispose of the 277 remaining arms caches, whose approximate location was conveyed to the Government by the first United Nations Mission in Colombia, on 15 September 2017.

26. From a judicial perspective, the Office of the Attorney General has indicated that priority will be given to investigations into the killing of social leaders and human rights defenders. According to the Office, out of 118 cases in 2016 and 2017, 59 cases show procedural advances. Within the Office of the Attorney General, the Special Investigation Unit provided for in the Peace Agreement has been established. According to Decree-law 898 of 29 May 2017, the focus of the Unit is on investigating and prosecuting criminal organizations and their support networks. The Unit has begun its investigation of the case of two land restitution leaders who were killed in Chocó on 27 November and 8 December.

27. On 18 December, Decree 2124 strengthening the system of early warnings in the Ombudsman's Office was issued. Based on a large network of staff of the Ombudsman's Office at the departmental and municipal levels, the system will, from now on, issue independent early warnings to state institutions that will be required to provide a rapid response at both the national and departmental levels. In a letter to my Special Representative, dated 20 December, the Interior Minister requested the Mission to appoint a representative to take part in the intersectoral commission for rapid response to early warnings, which will coordinate these efforts at the national level.

28. Finally, Decree 2078 of 7 December 2017 supplements existing provisions for the individual protection of people at risk, with provisions for the collective

protection of groups and communities. In addition, a complementary decree, which is nearing completion, creates a comprehensive programme for security and protection of communities, leaders and vulnerable groups in the areas most affected by the conflict.

B. Reintegration

29. The recent history of Colombia, with the recycling of combatants from one conflict to another, is a reminder that proper reintegration is key to guaranteeing non-repetition. The reintegration of FARC-EP members involves a set of complex challenges, including the continuing presence of illegal armed groups; thriving illicit economies in many of the areas in which the reintegration process is taking place; a model of productive reintegration that is hampered by the isolation and lack of infrastructure that characterizes rural areas; the lack of experience in Colombia with collective reintegration; and finally, reintegration provisions, agreed in the last phase of the negotiations on the Peace Agreement, that focus on short-term as opposed to long-term, sustainable reintegration activities.

30. As verified by the Mission, a sizeable number of former FARC-EP members have moved out of the territorial areas. The reasons are manifold, including family reunions, political activities and the search for more appropriate locations for reintegration. However, growing frustration with the lack of opportunities is also a major factor. In some locations, a significant number of former FARC-EP members have joined illegal or dissident groups.

Legal reintegration

31. Legal reintegration remains an essential prerequisite to political, social and economic reintegration and must be prioritized. Delays in this regard have caused frustration among former FARC-EP members and continuing controversy among the parties.

32. Of the 14,178 names of FARC-EP members presented by the organization, 12,451 have been accredited by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace to participate in the peace process, allowing them to receive reintegration benefits. The remaining 1,727 are still under administrative or judicial review or awaiting national identity documents. It is urgent that these cases be promptly resolved.

33. Out of a total of 3,495 former FARC-EP members identified in prison, 2,800 have been released, 454 cases are under review by the Government, and 241 have not been released by judicial authorities. An additional 187 names provided by FARC since 15 August have not yet been recognized by the Government. An additional 583 former FARC-EP members were given provisional releases as "peace advocates," of whom 268 have successfully resolved their legal status.

34. Owing to inconsistencies between the databases of the judiciary, the national police, the banks and the Office of the Inspector General, several former FARC-EP members were arrested or detained, even though they possessed the required legal documentation. On 18 December, the Government issued Decree 2125, which aims to avoid further unjustified detentions and clear the way for former FARC-EP members to be legally employed and receive reintegration payments through the banking system. Independently, the national police has included in its database a reference to the reintegration status of former FARC-EP members so as to facilitate the resolution of cases, where police information is outdated.

35. The parties agreed to allow former FARC-EP members who are serving prison time in other countries to accept the competence of the Special Jurisdiction. With

regard to 59 foreign former combatants, while some progress has been made in ensuring their transition to legality, thereby allowing them to remain in the country, they are still pending receipt of the special resident peace visa provided for in Decree-law 831 of 18 May 2017.

Political reintegration

36. Ensuring the political participation of former members of FARC-EP and their new political party is at the heart of the implementation of the Peace Agreement. On 31 October, the National Electoral Council registered FARC as a legal political party and endorsed its name, logo, political statutes and directors. On 1 November, party announced its candidates for the 2018 presidential and congressional elections. On 14 November, following misgivings expressed by the Registrar with regard to the legal status of FARC candidates, the Constitutional Court clarified that the legal suspension of convictions imposed on FARC members also applied to political disqualification. On 13 December, a FARC representative began to participate in the plenary chamber of the National Electoral Council, without voting rights, in keeping with the Agreement.

37. From 11 November to 11 December, the period for the registration of candidates, FARC registered 74 candidates, 39 per cent of whom are women, for the congressional elections, in Bogotá and in five departments — 23 for the Senate and 51 for the Chamber of Representatives. They included both former FARC-EP members and candidates from civil society, academia and trade unions.

38. The campaign for congressional elections began on 11 December. In a positive signal, several events were organized on the occasion of the launch of the FARC party, in various cities, without incident. As part of its mandate regarding the security guarantees, and in close contact with Electoral Observation Mission, a national non-governmental organization, the Mission will pay particular attention to the security of participants in the political campaign, irrespective of political affiliation.

Social and economic reintegration

39. The National Reintegration Council, responsible for the overall supervision of the reintegration process, met almost weekly during the reporting period and established working groups on gender, health, land and productive projects. It has contributed to improving coordination and generating confidence between those in charge of reintegration in both the Government and FARC. It has not, however, fulfilled its main task, namely the development of a national reintegration plan, which remains indispensable for providing momentum and coherence to reintegration efforts.

40. At the regional level, territorial reintegration councils have been established in 25 of the 26 territorial areas over the past two months. They are responsible for formulating territorial reintegration plans with a community-based approach. The importance of partnerships with regional and local actors, from both the public and private sector, including departmental and municipal authorities, has grown as the focus of reintegration shifts from short-term to longer-term goals and the alignment of reintegration projects with territorial development policies becomes essential. A departmental reintegration board established by the Governor of Antioquia, which brings together the departmental administration, FARC and the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, is working on access to land, employment, gender-related issues, education and infrastructure. In Villavicencio (Meta Department), a "solutions fair" targeted at former FARC-EP members who are outside the territorial areas was organized jointly by the Agency, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, the departmental government, the municipality of Villavicencio and the

Mission, to solve specific problems related to health, education, legal or banking issues of former combatants.

41. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, the lead agency for the reintegration process, continued to deploy personnel in the field. To date, 91 officials of the Agency have been deployed to all the territorial areas, with a focus on coordinating actions by state institutions and early reintegration, including by issuing national identity cards, opening bank accounts and registering former combatants in the subsidized health and pension systems. The Agency has established a new technical unit and appointed its director with the objective of facilitating the direct participation of former FARC-EP members in the design of local and regional reintegration strategies.

42. During the reporting period, positive developments in the implementation of the early reintegration phase have taken place. As of 23 November, of 12,451 accredited former FARC-EP members, 11,860 have opened bank accounts; 11,362 have received their one-time reintegration allowance of $670; approximately 10,200 persons received five monthly stipends of $220; and 6,555 were registered with the public pension fund.

Health and education

43. To date, 10,363 ex-combatants have been registered with the subsidized health-care system. As of 23 November, 3,235 have benefited from the system's services.

44. As a transitional measure, in the first quarter of 2017, the Government established health-care facilities in each territorial area that provided services to nearby communities as well as to the territorial area. Some facilities faced shortfalls in supplies, while others ceased to operate. Decree 2026 of 4 December 2017 on the regulation of the territorial areas specifies that health services provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection will end on 31 December. Given the high sensitivity of health-care issues among former FARC-EP members in the territorial areas, it is advisable that these services be extended.

45. Specialized health care remains a serious challenge, as half of the territorial areas are far removed from the nearest specialized health-care centre. The situation is particularly difficult for 130 former combatants living with disabilities, who need regular rehabilitation care that may only be provided in large cities. The cost of transportation and lodging can amount to up to 40 per cent of their basic income. The National Reintegration Council has created a technical health panel to prioritize addressing 26 serious cases.

46. Another very sensitive issue relates to health care for the growing number of pregnant women, lactating mothers and children in the territorial areas. The Ministry of Health, the National Reintegration Council and the International Organization for Migration have agreed on a project directed towards the territorial areas and neighbouring communities, which will start in three territorial areas. Support is needed to ensure the project's expansion to other areas and its sustainability. Support is also needed for child-care facilities so as to enable women to participate fully in reintegration activities.

47. With regard to education, the National Vocational Training Service was one of the first public institutions present in the territorial areas, providing training to 2,870 former combatants as well as surrounding communities. The Ministry of Education is implementing a programme, under the title "Arando la educación", which has provided elementary and secondary education to over 3,000 former combatants and 1,500 people from nearby communities; 300 ex-combatants completed secondary school this year. In some cases, educational activities suffer from shortfalls in

infrastructure and educational materials. The mobile library initiatives promoted by the Ministry of Culture in various territorial areas are another noteworthy effort.

Productive and income-generating projects

48. While progress has been made on early reintegration, productive projects and other forms of income generation have become a central concern of FARC members and, according to Mission surveys, are one of the most important factors in the former combatants' decision on where to settle. Small groups of former combatants are relocating outside the territorial areas to participate in collective reintegration efforts in more appropriate locations. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization has responded to assist former combatants who relocated to Mutatá and Yondó (Antioquia), La Julia (Meta), Santa Cecilia (Risaralda) and Patía (Cauca).

49. A cooperative established by FARC under the Peace Agreement, known as Ecomun, was formally registered in the Chamber of Commerce in July 2017. The Ministry of Labour has trained 5,200 individuals in solidarity economics over the past three months. There have been delays in issuing training certificates, which are a prerequisite for the creation of local cooperatives. So far, 18 cooperatives were established with the support of the Ministry, 9 of which are currently operating in six territorial areas. Each former combatant is entitled to receive one-off seed capital of approximately $2,700 to initiate an individual or collective productive project. It is essential that funding be provided to former FARC-EP members who request it for their productive activities.

50. In November, the procedure for submitting productive projects to the National Reintegration Council was established. As of 23 November, three productive projects were presented in Pondores (La Guajira), in Miravalle (Caquetá) and in La Variante (Nariño). They are currently being reviewed by the Council. During the reporting period, 26 experts were selected by the Council and deployed by the United Nations Development Programme to support the design of projects in all territorial areas. The formulation of projects is expected to be largely completed by January 2018. However, some territorial areas have difficult access or a lack suitable land and there will therefore be a need to formulate and implement projects outside the territorial areas.

51. Meanwhile, in many territorial areas, productive projects have been undertaken independently by former combatants using their monthly stipend and one-time reintegration payments. The territorial area of Pondores (La Guajira) hosts a comprehensive farm project, on land leased for 10 years, and a textile workshop. The territorial area of La Montañita (Caquetá) has a large pineapple cultivation project that has received the support of producers and private owners. In the territorial area of Miravalle (Caquetá), the ex-combatants have undertaken a fish farming project. The territorial area of Colinas (Guaviare) hosts four productive projects (agriculture, livestock, fish farming and poultry farming). In some cases, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization and the National Vocational Training Service assisted in the design of these projects. Female ex-combatants in some territorial areas have organized themselves in associations to promote productive projects, such as a network of women weavers in territorial area of Charras (Guaviare). Many more such initiatives are in progress and support is required for the economic empowerment of women.

52. Several projects are under implementation by Government agencies, non-governmental organizations and United Nations entities, with international support, including the environmental development project entitled "Ambientes para la paz" in three territorial areas (San Vicente del Caguán (Caquetá), Mesetas and Vista Hermosa (Meta)) which benefits 3,800 people (30 per cent former combatants, 70 per

cent residents of communities). The United Nations Development Programme is implementing small quick-impact projects in 31 areas (the 26 territorial areas and five additional zones). The European Union decided to include reintegration among the priorities of the European Union fund to support peace in Colombia and, on 30 November, approved funding for four reintegration programmes, for a total amount of 20 million euros, including a food security project implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The United Nations, through the multi-donor trust fund, will also support productive reintegration in 14 territorial areas. The prompt adoption by the National Reintegration Council of its national strategy and plan would enable all actors to ensure cohesion among these different initiatives.

53. To date, the Mission has identified 90 productive projects in 23 territorial areas, of which 47 are at the design stage, 16 at the pilot stage and 27 under implementation. The projects have an estimated 3,000 direct beneficiaries.

54. Over the past several months, the Mission has reached out to representatives of the private sector to stress the importance of a successful reintegration process as a contribution to both the security and development of rural areas. Recently, private companies have come forward to explore collaboration with productive reintegration projects. In the Department of Meta, members of the private sector have been willing to engage directly in the development of farming projects in the territorial area of Mesetas. Dialogue initiatives have taken place between FARC, land owners and cattle farmers in Cesar and La Guajira Departments, covering reintegration, justice and reconciliation. Presidential Directive No. 03, published on 20 December, establishes working modalities between the Government and the private sector to define productive initiatives in line with the reintegration plans.

55. While access to land was not included in the reintegration provisions of the Peace Agreement, the viability of reintegration in rural areas is inseparable from access to land, which is a critical prerequisite for the success of productive initiatives. I welcome President Santos' leadership in ensuring access to land in the form of property to former combatants dedicated to such productive projects. The National Land Agency announced that it had identified 14 properties, covering a total of 630 hectares, within territorial areas. In addition, FARC has submitted a proposal concerning 67 plots, covering 5,000 hectares, for productive projects, all located outside the territorial areas, for reintegration projects. Few measures will be more effective in stabilizing the reintegration process and ensuring its long-term sustainability than access to land by former combatants who, in their very large majority, are farmers or come from farming families and are determined to build a new life in the rural areas of Colombia.

56. Among other income-generating initiatives, a humanitarian demining organization composed of ex-combatants, Humanicemos, received its accreditation, as well as commitments of funding from the multi-donor trust fund and the European Union. With the technical support and accompaniment of the Government's agency on mine action and the United Nations Mine Action Service, the international non-governmental organizations Halo Trust and Ayuda Popular Noruega (Norwegian People's Aid), the demining organization will be training, initially, 146 former FARC-EP members in demining tasks, with women accounting for 20 per cent of the participants. In a census carried out by the National University, 1,700 former FARC-EP members had indicated interest in participating in the programme.

C. Cross-cutting issues

Gender

57. There has been modest progress in the inclusion of a gender-sensitive approach to reintegration and security guarantees. The National Reintegration Council took the welcome step of creating a technical working group on gender. Similarly, the National Commission on Security Guarantees established a technical commission on developing a territorial and gender-sensitive approach. Women's organizations have called for greater representation in the Commission. Female former FARC-EP members (women make up 23 per cent of former FARC-EP members who demobilized, according to the national census), have developed their own strategy for reintegration through their committee on women, gender and sexual diversity, and presented it to the Council.

58. The Mission maintains a regular dialogue with the national platforms of women's organizations, as well as regional and local organizations. It has also established regular coordination with the Special High-level Forum for Women, which is responsible for ensuring the gender-sensitive implementation of the Peace Agreement. The Mission and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) are also developing a protocol on areas of joint engagement.

59. The Mission has reinforced its network of 34 gender focal points across its regional and field offices, who work to support gender mainstreaming in all Mission activities and to liaise with women's organizations, women leaders and women living in the territorial areas. In December, the Mission organized a retreat for all gender focal points that included the participation of the Ombudsman's Office, the national police and FARC gender focal points from the 26 territorial areas. Participants called for greater attention to issues affecting female members of FARC, including insecurity, domestic violence, adequate care for pregnant and lactating women, and improved access to reproductive health care and psychosocial support.

Child protection

60. The Mission maintains regular contact with the Presidential Counsellor for Human Rights on the implementation of the programme entitled "A different path of life" for the reintegration of 135 children (who are now adolescents) associated with FARC. During the reporting period, 122 children presented declarations to the Victims' Unit to qualify for reparations, 92 have been recognized as victims and 42 qualified for monetary compensation. All have been registered in the social security system. At the local level, the Mission liaises with the family defenders assigned to specific children participating in the programme, including follow-up on specific cases. Twenty-eight of the adolescents, who have turned 18, have transferred to the adult reintegration programme.

61. Over the reporting period, the Mission has followed up on seven cases of adolescents who chose to stay in or return to the territorial areas. Some of those adolescents have left the territorial areas, raising concerns about their protection. The Mission has brought the cases to the attention of the Presidential Counsellor and will provide local support to the Office of the Counsellor to assist in the response. As concerns children of former FARC-EP members living in the territorial areas, the Mission has observed that they receive limited specialized attention and inadequate facilities for children. A clear strategy from the Colombian Family Welfare Institute is needed on how to provide specialized services for those children.

62. Finally, I note with concern the persistence of complaints of recruitment of children by illegal armed groups, often from indigenous communities, especially in Caqueta, Cauca and Chocó Departments. In August, the death in combat of a 13-year-old child recruited by a dissident group was confirmed.

Ethnic and indigenous issues

63. The Mission maintains regular dialogue with ethnic organizations, including for indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations, at the national, regional and local levels. Those organizations continue to call for the inclusion of ethnic perspectives throughout the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Some 18 per cent of former FARC-EP members identified as indigenous and 12 per cent as Afro-Colombian. In Cesar, Chocó and La Guajira Departments, dialogue between indigenous authorities and FARC representatives has resulted in specific reintegration processes for former FARC-EP members from indigenous communities.

64. The Mission is concerned about violence and intimidation against Afro-Colombian and indigenous leaders, including, notably, the murder of an Afro-Colombian leader and two Awá indigenous farmers in Tumaco, in October, and the killing of an indigenous governor in Chocó, also in October, for which the Ejército de Liberación Nacional took responsibility. The Mission has facilitated exchanges between ethnic authorities, including the Indigenous Guard, and the public security forces on security and protection matters in ethnic territories. The Mission has also worked with Afro-Colombian and indigenous authorities and organizations in its verification activities, including on the case of the murder of an indigenous journalist in Cauca on 8 October.

D. Temporary bilateral ceasefire between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional

65. On 8 December, I provided the Security Council an update on the implementation of the temporary bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), signed on 4 September 2017. The ceasefire, unless extended, will expire on 9 January 2018. The Government and ELN convened a special round of talks in Bogota, from 5 to 12 December, to consider differences in interpretation with regard to the implementation of the current ceasefire, to convey to the United Nations the intention of the parties with regard to an extension of the ceasefire beyond 9 January and to define the location of the next round of talks.

66. On 15 December, in a letter in response to the request of my Special Representative to the parties to indicate their intentions regarding a possible extension of the ceasefire, the Senior Commander of ELN, Nicolas Rodriguez Bautista, conveyed ELN readiness to continue negotiations with the Government over a new ceasefire upon the resumption of talks in Quito, on 9 January, and its hope that the United Nations would accompany a new ceasefire once agreed. Also on 15 December, the Government stated that the parties had made progress in some areas during the special round of talks and urged ELN to resume discussions prior to 9 January. On 18 December, following the resignation of his predecessor, the Government appointed the new chief negotiator for the talks with ELN, Gustavo Bell, whose appointment was welcomed by ELN.

67. Since the start of its operations on 10 October, the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism and its four members, the Government, ELN, the Mission and the Catholic Church, have met 13 times. The Mission has deployed 33 teams in the field, in areas prioritized by the parties. The Mechanism has issued two monthly reports,

which were presented at the negotiating table and in which the absence of major confrontations between the two parties and the benefits of the ceasefire for the civilian population, despite some incidents, were noted.

E. External liaison and coordination with the United Nations system

68. The Mission has continued to enhance its engagement with government agencies; departmental, municipal and local authorities; civil society organizations; the Catholic Church and religious institutions; the private sector; and the international community. Continuous dialogue with ethnic representatives and women's organizations has strengthened the inclusion of different perspectives in verification reporting.

69. In keeping with Security Council resolution 2366 (2017), the Mission continued to work with the United Nations country team to ensure integrated planning and United Nations system-wide coordination, including at the regional and local levels. A joint mapping of counterparts has been conducted so as to better align messaging and outreach, options for shared information management capacities are being explored, and an integrated strategic framework has been adopted. Meanwhile, the thematic groups on reintegration and on security guarantees continued to meet regularly to share information and analysis and to engage with key counterparts.

IV. Mission structures

70. Currently, the Mission has a total of 248 civilian personnel and 170 international observers, who are deployed across 60 locations at the national, regional and local levels. All 19 observer-contributing countries, who contributed to the first mission, continue to contribute to the Verification Mission. The Mission is actively promoting my gender parity strategy, having reached the goal of women making up 50 per cent of civilian personnel by December and with women representing 15 per cent of international observers.

71. Pursuant to resolution 2366 (2017), a range of preparatory activities prior to the initiation of the Verification Mission enabled it to be operational from the start of its mandate. On 5 October, the Security Council authorized additional tasks in its resolution 2381 (2017), relating to the verification of the ceasefire between the Government of Colombia and ELN. Once authorized, the Mission worked with Headquarters and observer-contributing countries to deploy 70 additional observers, redeploy existing personnel and observers, and reallocate vehicles, radios, information technology and safety equipment. It also delivered training material on ceasefire verification and undertook security analysis. As a result, the Mission quickly established a presence in the majority of locations that were prioritized by the parties.

Mission support

72. The Mission worked during the reporting period to complete the administrative and logistical liquidation of the previous mission and to operationalize the Verification Mission. With regard to the liquidation, the United Nations and the Government of Colombia signed the memorandum of understanding governing cost-sharing arrangements as well as the letter of assist for the provision of vehicles to the Mission under the previous mandate. The Mission continues to review invoices submitted by the Government and make payments for goods and services provided under the signed letters of assist.

73. The eight regional offices previously financed under United Nations and Government cost-sharing arrangements were relocated to premises contracted exclusively by the Mission and one additional regional office was opened in Pasto. In addition, the existing regional office in Bucaramanga was relocated to Cucuta. Seven new sub-offices were opened. As a result of proactive efforts to explore this option, two of the nine regional offices and three of the sub-offices are co-located with United Nations agencies, funds or programmes.

74. The Mission is currently in the process of contracting small prefabricated camps for the 26 territorial areas. Land for the camps, where possible, is being rented in sites formerly occupied by the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, with the intention of maintaining proximity to the territorial areas and achieving economies as the locations are already levelled, prepared and have some infrastructure in place. The Mission has entered into an agreement with the United Nations Office for Project Services for project management services at the proposed sites. Since the project is not likely to be completed until February and, given the urgent need for Mission presence in territorial areas, the Mission has concurrently embarked on a plan to establish temporary tented camps in those locations. The letter of assist for medical services is being renegotiated with the Government to ensure that Mission personnel will be provided medical care and evacuation services in all Mission locations, under the same terms and conditions applicable to the previous mission. Given that Government-provided medical personnel have been withdrawn from the 26 assembly zones and points, where the laying down of arms took place, the Mission has proceeded to contract paramedics in the territorial areas and in monitoring locations relating to the Government-ELN ceasefire that are more than one hour away from suitable medical facilities.

Safety and security of United Nations personnel

75. The United Nations country Security Management Team has recently endorsed the country security plan and approved updated security risk assessments. In those documents it is noted that, while there has been an overall reduction in national violence indicators, the nature, type and source of potential threats to the safety and security of United Nations personnel and operations has become more diffuse. The Mission will continue to monitor those trends and to update its security operating procedures in accordance with the evolving security situation.

Conduct and discipline

76. The Mission has prioritized the strengthening of prevention measures regarding conduct and discipline. Activities have focused on induction training for new personnel, risk assessments and refresher trainings in field offices, the provision of information to the public on reporting mechanisms, the distribution of leaflets and pocket cards to Mission personnel summarizing the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and the issuance of the Mission's code of conduct.

77. During the reporting period, four allegations were reported to the Mission: one allegation was categorized as very serious misconduct and is currently under investigation. Two allegations were not substantiated. The fourth allegation was substantiated and corrective action is in process.

V. Observations

78. With the successful culmination of the ceasefire and the laying down of arms process and the conversion of FARC-EP into a political party, Colombia has entered a new phase of its recent history. Unprecedented opportunities have opened up to

address long-standing issues and for bringing security and development to the areas most affected by the conflict, which cover a third of the country's municipalities and more than half of its territory. The challenges, arising from decades of armed conflict, are daunting and interlocking: the lack of infrastructure, the absence of state institutions, extreme poverty, illegal economies and a legacy of violence. But much goodwill exists and is tangible in many sectors of the population, from farming communities to academic institutions and from churches to private businesses, who see the chance of building a more stable, more unified and more peaceful society.

79. Among the positive developments in the past three months is the entry into legal politics of the new FARC party. Trading weapons for politics and a chance to compete in elections was a central goal of the peace process. The upcoming months will be key to achieving that goal, and adequate security provision for all is essential. Another highlight of recent months was the positive impact of the temporary ceasefire between the Government and ELN. Communities have reported an improvement in the humanitarian situation, even if several serious incidents took place. This is no small achievement, and while the ceasefire has undoubtedly proved challenging and should be made more effective, the Government and ELN should make every effort to preserve these gains and enhance the benefits to the population.

80. In contrast to these positive developments, and while overall national security figures continue to show improvement compared to the years prior to the Peace Agreement, the increase in insecurity in several areas affected by the conflict is the most worrying feature of the post-agreement phase. The situation is dramatically illustrated by the growing number of murders and threats targeting social leaders, land restitution advocates, promoters of coca substitution programmes and human rights defenders. As recognized at the highest levels of the Government of Colombia, this trend and the proliferation of illegal armed actors associated with it, must be brought under control as a matter of priority.

81. In this respect, I welcome the fact that, in line with the Peace Agreement, the Government has recently equipped itself with new instruments to bring about a more robust and coordinated response. A new community- and prevention-oriented deployment of the security forces in the more sensitive areas; a strengthened early warning system for the Ombudsman's Office; a renewed focus on the investigations into the killing of community leaders by the Office of the Attorney General and its new Special Investigation Unit; and a more collective approach to the protection of communities are all important developments that will make a difference if applied with determination and the necessary resources.

82. The successful reintegration of former FARC-EP members into civilian life is essential for stabilizing the former conflict areas. The avenue selected by FARC, of collective reintegration in rural areas, is more complex than the search for individual employment. It will take time and carries the risks inherent in any agricultural endeavour. But the increasing number of projects in the territorial areas shows that it is aligned with the skills and aspirations of many members of the former FARC-EP. I welcome the approach to reintegration taken by President Santos and FARC, as an investment in the security and development of the rural communities. Partnerships between former FARC-EP members and different actors are important for the success of the reintegration process, and in this regard, I warmly welcome the growing role and commitment of departmental and municipal authorities, the private sector, universities and civil society organizations in supporting productive projects and other reintegration initiatives.

83. The obstacles Colombia faces are indeed formidable. I am, however, confident that the momentum generated by the end of the conflict between the State of Colombia and FARC-EP can be preserved. A large majority of Colombians, including those who

do not fully identify with the Peace Agreement, are aware of the historic opportunity and willing to embrace it, regardless of political affiliation. They can count on the continued support of the Verification Mission and the members of the United Nations country team, who I thank for their tireless efforts in support of peace in Colombia. The continued support of the observer-contributing countries, the guarantor nations and observer nations, the Security Council and the broader international community remains a source of strength to the peace process.